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A D V I C E  
A BOOK OF POEMS

MAXWELL RODENHEIM

38 First ed







**ADVICE**

Daniel E. Moran Jr. - 23 -

**NEW POETRY**  
**FALL, 1920**

**OCTOBER**

*By Robert Bridges*

**THE FORERUNNER**

*By Kahlil Gibran*

**WORDSWORTH: AN ANTHOLOGY**

*By R. Cobden-Sanderson*

**ADVICE**

*By Maxwell Bodenheim*

# A D V I C E

## A BOOK OF POEMS

By MAXWELL BODENHEIM  
//



ALFRED A. KNOPF, PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK  
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1920

Co

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BY THE AUTHOR

**PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**TO  
MINNA  
WHOSE SMILE IS MY THRONE**



Some of the poems which compose this book have appeared in the *Yale Review*, the *Smart Set*, the *New Republic*, *Reedy's Mirror*, the *Dial*, the *Touchstone*, the *Little Review*, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, the *Century*, and the *New York Tribune*. They are good, in spite of their numerous appearances.



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# **ADVICE**



## **ADVICE TO A STREET-PAVEMENT**

Lacerated grey has bitten  
Into your shapeless humility.  
Little episodes of roving  
Strew their hieroglyphics on your muteness.  
Life has given you heavy stains  
Like an ointment growing stale.  
Endless feet tap over you  
With a maniac insistence.

O unresisting street-pavement,  
Keep your passive insolence  
At the dwarfs who scorn you with their feet.  
Only one who lies upon his back  
Can disregard the stars.

## ADVICE TO A BUTTER-CUP

Undistinguished butter-cup  
Lost among myriads of others,  
To the red ant eyeing you  
You are giant stillness.  
He pauses on the boulder of a clod,  
Baffled by your nearness to the sky.  
But to the black loam at your feet  
You are the atom of a pent-up dream.

Undistinguished butter-cup,  
Take your little breath of contemplation,  
Undisturbed by haughty tricks of space.

## ADVICE TO A RIVER STEAM-BOAT

The brass band plays upon your decks,  
Like a sturdy harlot aping mirth,  
And people in starched shields  
Stuff their passions with sweet words,  
Life is swishing in the air,  
Like a tipsy, unseen bridegroom.

O humbly grunting river boat,  
Take the churning water and the sun  
Like one who plays with his own chains  
And flings their turmoil to the sky.  
Only a voice can leap above high walls.

## **FOUNDRY WORKERS**

Brown faces twisted back  
Into an ecstasy of tight resistance;  
Eyes that are huge sweat drops  
Unheeded by the struggle underneath them—  
Throughout the night you stagger under walls  
Where life is squeezed to squealing bitterness.  
Beneath your heaving flash of limbs  
Your thoughts are smashed to a dejected trance  
And you are swept, like empty mites,  
Into a glistening frenzy of motion . . .  
Yet, on a Sunday afternoon  
I have seen you straightening your backs with  
slow smiles;  
Walking through the streets  
And patiently groping for lost outlines.  
Your lips were placid bruises  
Almost fearing to relax,  
And often out upon some green

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Your legs swung themselves into long lost shapes.

Perhaps upon your death-beds  
You will lift your hands, with a wraith of grace,  
Showing life a last, weak curve  
Of the rhythm he could not kill.

## ADVICE TO A HORNED TOAD

Hornèd Toad of cloven brown,  
Rock souls have dwindled to your eyes  
And thrown a splintered end upon your blood.  
Night and day have vanished  
To you, who squat and watch  
Years loosen one sand grain until  
Its fall becomes your moment.  
Tall things plunge over you,  
Slashing their dreams with motion  
That holds the death of all they seek,  
But you, to whom fierce winds are ripples,  
Do not move lest you lose the taste of stillness.

Hornèd Toad of cloven brown,  
Never hop from your grey rock crevice  
Mute with interwoven beginnings and ends.  
The fluid lies of motion  
Leave no remembrance behind.

## ADVICE TO A FOREST

O trees, to whom the darkness is a child  
Scampering in and out of your long, green  
beards;

O trees, to whom sunlight is a tattered pilgrim  
Counting his dreams within your hermitage  
And slipping down the road, in twilight robes;  
O trees, whose leaves make an incense of sound  
Reeling with the beat of your caught feet,  
Do not mingle your tips in startled hatred,  
When little men come to fell you.

These men will saw you into strips  
Of pointed brooding, blind with paint,  
But underneath you men will chase  
The grey staccato of their lives  
Down a glaring maze of walls  
Much harder than your own.

And when, at last, the deep brown gaze  
Of stolidly amorous time steals over you,

The little men who bit into your hearts  
Will stray off in a patter of rabbits' feet.  
Look down upon these children then  
With the aloof and weary tolerance  
That all still things possess,  
O trees, to whom the darkness was a child  
Scampering in and out of your long, green  
beards.

## RATTLESNAKE MOUNTAIN FABLE I

Rounded to a wide eyed clownishness  
Crowned by the shifting bravado  
Of his long, brown ears,  
The rabbit peeked at the sky.  
To him, the sky seemed an angelic  
Pasture stripped to phantom tranquility,  
Where one could nibble thoughtfully.  
He longed to leave his mild furtiveness  
And speak to a boldness puzzled by his flesh.  
With one long circle of despairing grace  
He flashed into the air,  
Leaping toward his heaven.  
But down he crashed against a snake  
Who ate him with a meditative interest.  
From that day on the snake was filled  
With little, meek whispers of concern.  
The crushed and peaceful rabbit's dream  
Cast a groping hush upon his blood.

He curled inertly on a rock,  
In cryptic, wilted savageness.  
In the end, his dry, grey body  
Was scattered out upon the rock,  
Like a story that could not be told.

## ADVICE TO A BLUE-BIRD

Who can make a delicate adventure  
Of walking on the ground?  
Who can make grass-blades  
Arcades for pertly careless straying?  
You alone, who skim against these leaves,  
Turning all desire into light whips  
Moulded by your deep blue wing-tips,  
You who shrill your unconcern  
Into the sternly antique sky.  
You to whom all things  
Hold an equal kiss of touch.

Mincing, wanton blue-bird,  
Grimace at the hoofs of passing men.  
You alone can lose yourself  
Within a sky, and rob it of its blue!

## TO A FRIEND

Your head is steel cut into drooping lines  
That make a mask satirically meek:  
Your face is like a tired devil weak  
From drinking many vague and unsought wines.  
The sullen skepticism of your eyes  
For ever trying to transcend itself,  
Is often entered by a wistful elf  
Who sits naïvely unperturbed and wise.

And this same remnant, with its youthful wiles  
Held curiously apart from blasphemies,  
Twirls starlight shivers out upon your sneers  
And changes them to little, startled smiles.  
And all your insolence drops to its knees  
Before the half-won grandeur of past years.

## **ADVICE TO A WOMAN**

The sloping lines of your shoulders  
Speak of Chinese pagodas.  
They clash with your western face  
Where child and courtesan  
Clasp each other in a feigned embrace.  
Life, to you, is a liquid mirror.  
You stand with delicate, perpetual amazement,  
Vainly seeking your reflection.

## RATTLESNAKE MOUNTAIN FABLE II

August sauntered down the mountain-side,  
Dropping mottled, turbid wraiths of decay.  
The air was like an old priest  
Disrobing without embarrassment  
Before the dark and candid gaze of night.  
But these things brought no pause  
To the saucily determined squirrel.  
His eyes were hungrily upturned  
To where the stars hung — icily clustered nuts  
Dotting trees of solitude.  
He saw the stars just over the horizon,  
And they seemed to grow  
On trees that he could reach.  
So he scampered on, from branch to branch,  
Wondering why the fairy nut-trees  
Ran away from him.  
But, looking down, he spied  
A softly wild cheeked mountain pool,  
And there a handful of fairy nuts

Bit into the indigo cupping them.  
With a squeal of weary happiness  
The squirrel plunged into the mountain pool,  
And as he drowned within its soundless heart  
The fairy nuts were jigging over him,  
Like the unheard stirring of a poem.

## ADVICE TO A BUTTERFLY

Aimless petal of the wind,  
Spinning gently weird circles,  
To the flowers underneath  
You are a drunken king of motion;  
To the plunging winds above  
You are momentary indecision.

Aimless petal of the wind,  
Waver carelessly against this June.  
The universe, like you, is but  
The drowsy arm of stillness  
Spinning gently weird circles in his sleep.

## **ADVICE TO A POOL**

**Be a liquid threshold for the dawn  
And let night touch you with his back.  
The earth-bowl prisoning you, and cold night  
winds**

**Are only pause and rhythm  
Within an endless fantasy,  
But you, like they, can be  
A dream from the loins of a dream,  
And build a golden stairway of escape.**

**O coolly unperturbed pool,  
Slap your ripples in laughter at men,  
Who splash you with their lordly hands.  
Time is but a phantom dagger  
That motion lifts to slay itself.**

## WHEN FOOLS DISPUTE

A trickle of dawn insinuated itself  
Through the crevices of black satiation.  
The elderly trees coughed, lightly, hurriedly,  
In remonstrance against the invasion.  
Lean with a virginal poison,  
The grass-blades shook, immune to light and  
time.  
A bird lost in a tree  
Shrilly flirted with its energy . . .  
One fool, in the garden, spoke to another.

## **ADVICE TO A GRASS-BLADE**

**Thin and dark green symbol  
Of an earth forever raising  
Myriads of chained wings,  
Breezes have a form, to you,  
And sounds break into vivid shape.  
The proud finality of tiny sight  
Cannot lure your pliant blindness.**

**Thin and dark green blade,  
Be not awed by trees and men  
Whose sound is all that gives them life.  
You reach the sky because your face  
Is not turned toward it.**

## EAST-SIDE: NEW YORK

An old Jew munches an apple,  
With conquering immersion  
All the thwarted longings of his life  
Urge on his determined teeth.  
His face is hard and pear-shaped;  
His eyes are muddy capitulations;  
But his mouth is incongruous.  
Softly, slightly distended,  
Like that of a whistling girl,  
It is ingenuously haunting  
And makes the rest of him a soiled, grey back-  
ground.

Hopes that lie within their grave  
Of submissive sternness,  
Have spilled their troubled ghosts upon this  
mouth,  
And a tortured belief  
Has dwindled into tenderness upon it . . .  
He trudges off behind his push-cart  
And the Ghetto walks away with him.

## TO A MAN

Master of earnest equilibrium,  
You are a Christ made delicate  
By centuries of baffled meditation.  
You curve an old myth to a peaceful sword,  
Like some sleep-walker challenging  
The dream that gave him shape.  
With gentle, antique insistence  
You place your child's hand on the universe  
And trace a smile of love within its depths.  
And yet, the whirling scarecrow men have made  
Of something that eludes their sight,  
May have the startling simplicity of your smile.

Once every thousand years  
Stillness fades into a shape  
That men may crucify.

## THE CHILD MEDITATES

The oak-tree in front of my house  
Smells different every morning.  
Sometimes it smells fresh and wise  
Like my mother's hair.  
Sometimes it stands ashamed  
Because it does n't own the smell  
It borrowed from our flower-garden.  
Sometimes it has a windy smell,  
As though it had come back from a long walk.  
The oak-tree in front of my house  
Has different smells, like grown up people.

My doll hides behind her pink cheeks,  
So that you can't see when she moves,  
But it doesn't matter because  
She always moves when no one is looking,  
And that is why people think she is still.  
People laugh when I say that my doll is alive,

But if she were dead, my fingers  
Wouldn't know that they were touching her.  
She lives inside a little house.  
And laughs because I cannot find the door.

The colours in my room  
Meet each other and hesitate.  
Is that what people call shape?  
Nobody seems to think so,  
But I believe that lines are dead shapes  
Unless they fall against each other  
And look surprised, like the colours in my room!

## PIERROT OBJECTS

They have made me an airy apology  
For the crude insistence of their flesh!  
They have made me twist my tongue  
Into fickle nonchalance!  
With a languid impudence  
I have tarried underneath the moon,  
While the haggard reticence  
Of their lives forgot itself within me!  
Well, I am rebelling  
At the men who make me  
Their grimacing marionnette!  
Let them find another dancing-teacher  
For their dull, unruffled fears.  
I am off to tear my black and white  
Into shreds, within a valley  
Where nakedness and colours do not need  
An artificial night to make them brave!

## COLUMBINE REFLECTS

They have moulded my face with a tear and a  
sneer.

They have sandalled me with caprice,  
And the heart they have given me  
Is a bag of red tissue-paper.  
Their loves are ragged and fat  
And seek the consolation  
Of a tinkling effigy!  
But even an effigy may wink  
An eye at its slinking masters!  
I can laugh at their frantic, tattered arms  
Spinning me into impish posturings,  
And jeer at the faces behind me!  
After my play I go to sleep,  
But they must sit, heavily looking at each other.

## RATTLE-SNAKE MOUNTAIN DIALOGUE

### RATTLE-SNAKE MOUNTAIN

Every night the sky grips my shoulder, in pain.  
The cows upon my slope  
Attack their blades of grass with less decision.  
The boulders reaching in to form my ribs,  
Are touched by evening dizziness, to dust,  
And lose their fierce pretence of hardness.  
Three crows in a row  
Search for clearer tongues, with steady discords.

### MAN

The nervous dissolution  
Which men call beauty stands  
Sternly watching itself.

### RATTLE-SNAKE MOUNTAIN

Evening, staggering under dead men's tongues,  
Makes light of my loneliness.

He comes like a madman dissolved  
Into unbearable quietness.  
But, drinking my vigorous muteness,  
He melts into that stream of seeking motion  
Which men call morning.

**MAN**

You teach him to make his recompense  
A solitary unfolding  
Walking perilously  
Between the scowls of life and death.

**RATTLE-SNAKE MOUNTAIN**

When he goes he is something more than him-self.  
He holds a lean alertness  
That, green as any leaf,  
Takes the flutterings of life, unperturbed.

**MAN**

Beauty is a proud stare  
Challenging all things to remove  
Their inattentive clamours:

**And some things bow abruptly,  
Timidly stroking their untouched skins.**

**RATTLE-SNAKE MOUNTAIN**

**And thus evening bows into morning.**

## DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PAST AND PRESENT POET

### PAST POET

I wrote of roses on a woman's breast,  
Glowing as though her blood  
Had welled out to a spellbound fierceness;  
And the glad, light mixture of her hair.  
I wrote of God and angels.  
They stole the simple blush of my desire  
To make their isolated triumph human.  
Knights and kings flooded my song,  
Catching with their glittering clash  
The unheard boldness in my life.  
Gods and nymphs slipped through my voice,  
And with the lofty scurrying of their feet  
Spurned the smirched angers of my days.

### PRESENT POET

You raised an unhurried, church-like escape.

You lingered in shimmering idleness;  
Or lengthened a prayer into a lance;  
Or strengthened a thought till it heaved off all  
of life

And dropped its sightless heaven into your  
smile.

Life, to us, is a colourless tangle.

Like madly gorgeous weavers

Our eyes reiterate themselves on life.

#### PAST POET

My towering simplicity  
Loosening an evening of belief  
Over the things it dared not view,  
Gladly shunned reality  
Just as your mad weaver does.

#### PRESENT POET

Reality is a formless lure,  
And only when we know this  
Do we dare to be unreal.

## **SMILES**

Smiles are the words beyond the words  
That thoughts abandon helplessly.  
Upon this nervous shop-girl's face,  
Where clusters of tiny limpness meet,  
A frightened spark leaps high and drops  
Into the hot pause of a banished love.  
A lustrelessly plump  
Girl beside her does not know  
That her face for moments glows  
Into a helpless solitude.  
Upon an old man's face  
Are gleams of meek embarrassment —  
The faded presence of some old debt?  
This woman's face is scorched  
By a torch that falls from weary hands  
And makes her laugh an unheard lie.  
The face of this tamed sprite  
Shimmers with an understanding

**Of the opaque loss she cannot bear,  
And I see that smiles are sometimes  
Words beyond the words  
That thoughts abandon hopefully.**

## THE COURTESAN CHATS

Last night I met a passive man  
With almost no curve to his face,  
And skin relentlessly white.  
He made me tell his fortune  
With a pack of cards.

“ Jack of hearts — your love will be  
A scullion overturning trays of food  
And standing dubiously in their midst.”  
“ Queen of diamonds — you will have a wife  
Like a thistle dipped in frost,  
Helpless in your sheathed hands.”

“ Deuce of clubs — a downcast jester  
Will pester you with slanting malice  
When you seek to play the king.”

“ Ace of hearts — your life will stand  
Straight in a desperate majesty,  
Its lurid robes ever slipping  
And one wound endlessly dripping.”

**The passive man blew out a candle  
On the table and bade me leave,  
Not desiring me to see his face.**

## THE MUNTEBANK CRITICIZES

I lose all sense of profiles,  
Strolling through your greys and blacks and  
browns!  
No man bestows his orange robe  
Soberly upon your uncoloured pavements,  
Rebuking life for being death.  
No woman taunts her sorrows  
With a coloured haughtiness.  
When you take to colours, you are ashamed,  
Like pages nibbling at a pilfered tart.  
You go back quickly to your coldness.  
And since you have no colours on your clothes,  
You walk in straight and measured lilts  
As befits the seriously blind.  
Your women do not stroll as though  
Each step were a timid intrigue  
Woven into the climax to which they fare.

Pistols, rhapsodies and heavy odours  
Drugged the lustre of my time.  
Yet, we had a virtue.  
We lavished colours on our backs  
And ravished our sorrow with brightness  
That often gave a lightness to our feet!

## TO LI T'AI PO

They are writing poems to you:  
White devils who have not  
Smeared the distant yellow of your life  
Upon their skins.  
Faces where snob and harlequin  
Ogle each other in two, cold colours,  
White and red;  
Faces where middle age  
Sits, tearing a last gardenia;  
Faces continually cracked  
By the brittle larceny of age;  
Faces where emotions  
Stand disarmed within a calm mirage:  
These faces bend over paper  
And steal from you a little silver and red  
So that their lives may seem to bleed  
Under the prick of a flashing need.

The old and tired smile  
Of one who spies too much within himself  
To spare the effort of a halting frown,  
Brushed its sceptre over your face.  
You gave kind eyes to your hope,  
Desiring it to grope unfearing  
Underneath the toppling mountain-tops.  
The wine you drank was a lake  
In which you splashed and found a vigour;  
The wine you drank was void of taste.  
Your yellow skin resembled  
A balanced docility  
Smiling at all things — even at itself —  
Li T'ai Po.

## INSANITY

Like a vivid hyperbole,  
The sun plunged into April's freshness,  
And struck its sparkling madness  
Against the barnlike dejection  
Of this dark red insane asylum.  
A softly clutching noise  
Stumbled from the open windows.  
Now and then obliquely reeling shrieks  
Rose, as though from men  
To whom death had assumed  
An inexpressibly kindly face.  
A man stood at one window,  
His gaunt face trembling underneath  
A feverish jauntiness.  
A long white feather slanted back  
Upon his almost shapeless hat,  
Like an innocent evasion.  
Hotly incessant, his voice

Methodically flogged the April air:  
A voice that held the clashing bones  
Of happiness and fear;  
A voice in which emotion  
Sharply ridiculed itself;  
A monstrously vigorous voice  
Mockingly tearing at life  
With an unanswerable question.

Hollowed out by his howl,  
I turned and saw an asylum guard.  
His petulantly flabby face  
Rolled into deathlike chips of eyes.  
He bore the aimless confidence  
Of one contentedly playing with other men's  
wings.  
He walked away; the man above still shrieked.  
I could not separate them.

## TRACK-WORKERS

The rails you carry cut into your hands,  
Like the sharp lips of an unsought lover.  
As you stumble over the ties  
Sunlight is clinging, yellow spit  
Raining down upon your faces.  
You are the living cupidors of day.  
Dirt, its teasing ghost, dust,  
And passionless kicks of steel, fill you.  
Flowers sprouting near the tracks,  
Brush their lightly odoured hands  
In vain against your stale jackets of sweat.  
Within you, minds and hearts  
Are snoring to the curt rhythm of your breath.  
You do not see this blustering blackbird  
Promenading on a barbed-wire fence.  
He eyes you with spritelike hauteur,  
Unable to understand  
Why your motions endlessly copy each other.

One of you, a meek and burly Pole,  
Peers a moment at the strutting blackbird  
With a fleeting shade of dull resentment. . . .  
There is always one among you  
Who recoils from glimpsing corpses.

## FIGURE

Through the turbulent servility  
Of a churlish city street  
He strides opaquely; nothing in his walk  
Resembles an advancing gleam.  
His legs are muffled iron  
Stubbornly following even thoughts,  
His gaily pugnacious head  
Seems worried because no dread  
Remains for it to slay.  
His eyes hold an austerity  
That recalls itself while leaping,  
And often melts into amusement.  
The bent poise of his body  
Tells of walls that threw him back,  
Only to crumble underneath  
The stunned friendliness of his face.  
Through the angularly churlish street  
He walks, and stoops beneath the captured  
weight  
Of eyes that do not see him.

## NEGROES

The loose eyes of an old man  
Shone aloof upon his boyish face;  
And a sluggish innocence  
Hugged his dull brown skin.  
He sang a hymn caught from his elders  
And his voice resembled  
A quavering, feverish laugh  
Softened in a swaying cradle.  
His life had found a refuge in his voice,  
And the rest of him was sickly flesh  
Ignorant of life and death.  
Like a crushed, excited clown  
His mother shuffled out upon the porch.  
Slowly her dark brown face resolved  
Into the hushed and sulky look  
Of one who stands within a dim-walled trap.  
Lazily uncertain,  
She raised the boy into her arms.

**Then her voice swung in the air  
Like a quavering, feverish laugh  
Softened in a swaying cradle.**

## BROADWAY

With sardonic futility  
The multi-coloured crowd,  
Hurried by fervent sensuality,  
Flees from something carried on its back.  
Endlessly subdued, a sound  
Pours up from the crowd,  
Like some one ever gasping for breath  
To utter releasing words.  
Through the artificial valley  
Made by gaudy evasions,  
The stifled crowd files up and down,  
Stabbing thought with rapid noises.  
Women strutting dulcetly,  
Embroider their unappeased hungers,  
And men stumble toward a flitting opiate.  
Sometimes a moment breaks apart  
And one can hear the knuckles  
Of children rapping on towering doors:

[58]

**Rapping on the highway  
Where civilization parades  
Its frozen amiabilities!**

## FIFTH AVENUE (NEW YORK)

Seasons bring nothing to this gulch  
Save a harshly intimate anecdote  
Scrawled, here and there, on paint and stone.  
The houses shoulder each other  
In a forced and passionless communion.  
Their harassed angles rise  
Like a violent picture-puzzle  
Hiding a story that only ruins could reveal;  
Their straight lines, robbed of power,  
Meet in dwarfed rebellion.  
Sometimes they stand like vastly flattened faces  
Suffering ants to crawl  
In and out of their gaping mouths.  
Sometimes, in menial attitudes  
They stand like Gothic platitudes  
Slipshodly carved in dark brown stone.

Tarnished solemnities of death  
Cast their transfigured hue on this avenue.  
The cool and indiscriminate glare  
Of sunlight seems to desecrate a tomb,  
And the racing people seem  
A stream of accidental shadows.  
Hard noises strike one's face and make  
It numb with momentary reality,  
But the noiseless undertone returns  
And they change to unreal jests  
Made by death.

## YOUNG WOMAN

So we have a face  
Cupped by tender insolences,  
Half repenting insolences  
Teasing their own angers.  
Then, a tense exuberance  
Brushes them away  
And burns a humbly erect  
Queen upon her face.  
This happens in the space  
Between a frown and indecision.  
Her face becomes forlornly wild,  
And a beggarly impatience  
Hovers into furtive shame.  
All the supplely intricate flame  
Vanishes, and leaves no mark.  
Her eyes are violently dark  
With a hopeless waiting;  
Her lips are isolated tatters —

[62]

All that is left of shattered recreating.  
Then, as quickly as she fled,  
The humble queen returns.  
Staring and unappeased  
She eyes her crumpled hands.

## TWO WOMEN ON A STREET

This street is callous apathy  
In a scale of greys and browns.  
Its black roof-line suggests  
Flat bodies unable to rise.  
Even its screams are listlessness  
Having an evil dream.  
Its air is swarthy rawness  
Troubled with ash cans and cellars.

An old woman ambles on  
With a black bag that seems part of her back,  
And a candidly hawk-like face.  
She croons a smothered lullaby  
That sifts a flitting roundness  
Into her sharply parted face.  
Then she surrenders her hand  
To the welter of a garbage can.  
A hugely wilted woman slinks by

With a cracked stare on her face.  
Her eyes are beaten discs  
Of the lamplight's ghastly keenness.  
She glides away as though the night  
Were a lover flogging her;  
Glides into the callous apathy  
Of this street, like one who cringes  
Happily into her lover's hallway.

## ADVICE TO MAPLE-TREES

O little maple-trees,  
Slender and unkempt, looking with shaggy  
askance  
Upon the moon-spiked solitude;  
O little maple-trees,  
Growing a little toward the sky  
That touches you to all eyes save your own,  
You rattle insistently for wings,  
But wings could never tear  
The stain of earth from your feet:  
The earth that gnaws at you until  
Your wing-cries strike the autumn night.  
You see, with me, this crescent moon  
Juggled on the tawny fingertip  
Of a running cloud.  
The touch of your desire, or its fall,  
Would but be symbols of an equal death.

## BOARDING-HOUSE EPISODE

Apples race into appetites:  
The unswerving mechanism of the table  
Hurries through the last dish of supper.  
Then an undulating interlude  
From people who have spent one pleasure,  
Distractedly juggling its aftermath  
And peering at new desires.  
One woman gazes at another  
While twitching murder shimmers in her eyes  
And skims across her face.  
Violets in a madman's scene,  
Suspended in the air,  
Are the eyes of her neighbour.  
And in between them sits the nervous man  
With face like pouting gargoyle,  
Whose brown eyes shout the things he cannot  
say:  
Explosive evasions;

Fears too tired to shriek;  
Renunciations groaning from their dungeons.  
He eyes each woman, like a man  
Solemnly trying to walk on mysterious ice.  
Crisp inanities ripple back and forth  
Among these three, like ghostly parrots  
Visiting each other's cages.  
She with crazy, violet eyes,  
Plays with her fork, as though its clink  
Rhymed with secret, chained thoughts;  
She with murder in her eyes,  
And curly voluminous body,  
Evenly plays her child-rôle.  
Cringing on the rim of middle age,  
With broken shields piled at her feet,  
She has made this man a haunted palace  
And she stands before the door  
She dare not open, with a dagger  
For the woman standing at her side.

They sit, afterwards, upon the veranda,  
Meekly greeting the velvet swagger of evening:  
Woman with twisted, violet eyes,  
Woman with hidden murder on her lips,  
And man like a pouting gargoyle.  
Then, like tired children,

**Their words grow cool and lazy.  
They draw closer to each other  
And, with a trembling curiosity,  
Look at each other's hands.**

## VAUDEVILLE MOMENT

They have carved a battle  
Across your hard face:  
Transfigured conflict,  
Lines like suspended lances.  
Your voice must be the uneven  
Clink of the last carver's chisel.  
Your soul must be a pious subterfuge  
Squinting its admiring eyes  
At the lifeless battle lining your face. . . .  
Middle aged vaudeville conductor,  
With a hunted leanness on your body,  
Sometimes the swing of your baton  
Sways with a brooding patience  
That violates your ended face.

Two acrobats appear,  
With their automaton bows.  
Their unlit motion does not strike  
The air into a hugging flame.

**They are blue and orange corpses  
Whirled in a sacrilegious festival.  
They vividly resemble  
The chiseled battle that grips  
This lean conductor's face:  
Motion without life,  
And life that holds no motion!**

## TO ORRICK JOHNS

The tread-mill roar that ever tramps between  
The smirched geometries of this stern place,  
Sweeps vainly on your drowsily reckless face  
Lost in a swirl of raped loves barely seen.  
Sometimes your keenly pagan lips are raised  
By thoughts too tense to shape themselves in  
speech:  
Still, wounded thoughts that silently beseech  
Your life to make them impotent and dazed.

O tangled and half-strangled child, you shrink  
For ever from yourself, and wear a pose  
Of nimble and impenetrable pride.  
Yet sometimes, wavering on the sudden brink  
Of jaded bitterness, you drop your clothes  
And weave a prayer into your naked stride.

## YOUNG POET

The grinning clamour on your face  
Dies abruptly, for moments:  
Boldness and timidity  
Are swept, transfigured, against each other.  
But the glistening turmoil  
Once more spurns itself with jests  
That light its troubled hands.

When too much pain has lowered  
The eyelids of your mood,  
A peaceful humour wraps your face.  
You are like an old man  
Watching children fly from his fingertips.  
In your kirtle of borrowed skies  
You find a sorrow luring your horizons  
Into hesitating brightness. . . .  
When night remembers, you have straightened  
Into stealthy, angry calmness  
Fingering it first, unsent arrow.

## STEEL-MILLS: SOUTH CHICAGO

### I

This red hush toppling over the sky,  
Wanders one step toward the stars  
And dies in a questioning shiver.  
The steel-mill chimneys fling their gaunt seeking  
A little distance into the red  
That softly combs their smoky hair.  
The steel-mill chimneys only live at night  
When crimson light makes love to them  
And star-light trickles through the red,  
Like glimpses of some far-off fairy tale.  
Throughout the day the steel-mill chimneys  
stand  
Rigidly within the wind-whirled glare:  
Only night can bring them supple straightness.

### II

From the little, brown gate that does not see  
them  
Because its eyes are blind with wooing soot,  
[74]

An endless stream of men scatters out  
Into the cool bewilderment of morning.  
Upon their lips a limply child-like surrender  
Curves out to the light, as though they felt  
The presence of an unassuming strangeness.  
The morning hides from their eyes:  
They walk on, in great strides,  
Like blind men swinging over a well-known  
scene.

Their faces twitch with echoes of iron fists:  
Their faces hold a swarthy stupor  
Loosened by little fingers of morning light  
Until it droops into reluctant life.  
And then their eyes, made flat by night,  
Swell into a Madonna-like surprise  
At children trooping back in huge disguise.  
The oranges in lunch-room windows change  
To sleek suns dipped in sleepy light,  
And rounded tarts in china plates  
Are like red heart-beats, resting but not dead.  
A trolley-car speeds by  
And seems a strident lyric of motion.  
Wagons rumble down the street  
Like drums enticing weariness to step. . . .  
The hearts of these steel-striding men  
Ascend and blend within their eyes,

And yet, these men are unaware of this.  
They only feel a fluid relief  
Voicing, in a clustered roar,  
The cries of struggling thoughts unshaped by  
words.

But there are some who break forth from the  
rest.

This old Hungarian strides along  
And binds naïvely-winged prayer-sandals  
Upon the heavy feet of shuffling loves.  
Gently, he plays with his beard  
As though his fingers touched a woman's hair.  
And this young Slav whose surly blasphemy  
Curls his face into a simple hate,  
Has taken iron into his laugh  
And uses it to hew his stony mind.  
While this Italian whose deep olive skin  
Shines like sunlight groping through dense  
leaves,  
Forgets his battered happiness  
And bows with mock grace to his shouting day.  
Beside him is a fellow-countryman  
Walking aimless, dazed with joy of motion.  
Upon his face a glistening vacancy  
Lights the mildly querying thoughts  
That seek each other but never meet.

Behind him steps a stalwart Pole  
Whose rhythmic, stately insolence  
Turns the sidewalk into a grey carpet,  
Grey as the shades that race across his face  
And show the savage squalor of his soul.  
Night has broken her heart upon him,  
Only scarring his bitter smile.  
A street of little, jack-o'-lantern houses  
Veering into leering saloons,  
Where the night, a crazy child,  
Dips herself in sallow rouge  
And chases oaths and heavy mirth  
And even human beings:  
Where the smoky sadness of the steel-mills  
Wanders hesitantly into death  
And drops a ghostly blur upon this girl.  
Her numbly waxen, cherub face  
Emerges gently from the doorway's blackness  
As though the dark had given birth to it.  
And then the falling light reveals  
That something of a village hangs about her:  
Something slumbering and ample.  
The doorway is too small to hold  
Her shoulders that are like a hill's broad curves  
Dwindled in the distance. . . .  
She is one of many earth-curved girls

Who listened to the insistent tinkle  
Of wind-winged music from a far-off land:  
Listened and knew not  
That their own hearts faintly played.  
So she ran to this far phantom,  
Only finding it within herself  
When the city's sly fists rained upon it.  
Then once more she fled  
With a dead heart whose restless pallor  
Crept to squalid wantonness, for refuge.  
And now she stands within this doorway,  
Uttering muffled innuendoes  
To the drained men of her race.  
Yet, something of a village hangs about her:  
Something slumbering and ample  
Stealing from the earth curves of her shoulders.

### III

The steel-mill workers straggle down this street,  
Clanging shut the doorways of their souls,  
And the sound rips their lips open.  
The steel-mill workers do not know of this:  
They only seek something that will sweeten  
The dirt that has eaten into their flesh  
And change it to raw music.  
They straggle down this street,

Their faces slack and oiled with amorousness.  
Like cats they play with their desires,  
Biting them with little laughs  
Until the shallow houses draw them in.  
And then the night pursues their revelry:  
Echoes from the shut doors of their souls.

#### IV

Three bent women and a child  
Stoop before the steel-mill gate  
As though the morning's ghastly murmur  
Washed against them in a wave  
Stiffening them into resisting curves.  
One is old and floridly misshapen.  
Years have melted out within her frame,  
Flooding her with lukewarm loves.  
The wrinkles on her flabby face  
Are like a faded scrawl of pain  
Scattered by the flesh on which it rests.  
Her frayed shawl hanging unaware of her  
Is a symbol of her heart.  
The woman standing at her side  
Is tall and like a slanting scarecrow  
Coldly jerking in the morning's glare.  
Only when she lifts a bony hand  
Tapping life against her face,

Does the image disappear.  
Dead dreams dangle in her heart,  
Limply hanging from their rainbow sashes,  
And whenever one sash trembles,  
Then, she lifts a gnarled hand to her face  
And tastes a moment of departing life.  
Near her stands a slimly rigid woman  
With an iron fear upon her bones.  
A worn strait-jacket of lines  
Cuts the dying youth upon her face.  
The slender child beside her,  
Buried within staidly murky clothes,  
Glances frightenedly up at her mother:  
Glances as one who dances to a gate  
And fumbles for a latch that hides itself.  
Then from the rusty-reveried steel-mill gate  
An endless stream of men scatter out  
Into the cool bewilderment of morning.  
Upon their lips a limply child-like surrender  
Curves out to the light, as though they felt  
The presence of an unassuming strangeness.

## SOUTH STATE STREET: CHICAGO

### I

Rows of blankly box-like buildings  
Raise their sodden architecture  
Into the poised lyric of the sky.  
At their feet, pawn-shops and burlesque  
theatres  
Yawn beneath their livid confetti.  
In the pawn-shop windows, violins,  
Cut-glass bowls and satchels mildly blink  
Upon the mottled turbulence outside,  
And sit with that detached assurance  
Gripping things inanimate.  
Near them, slyly shaded cabarets  
Stand in bland and ornate sleep,  
And the glassy luridness  
Of penny-arcades flays the eyes.  
The black crowd clatters like an idiot's wrath.

## II

Wander with me down this street  
Where the spectral night is caught  
Like moon-paint on a colourless lane . . .  
On this corner stands a woman  
Sleekly, sulkily complacent  
Like a tigress nibbling bits of sugar.  
At her side, a brawny, white-faced man  
Whose fingers waltz upon his checkered suit,  
Searches for one face amidst the crowd.  
(His smile is like a rambling sword.)  
His elbows almost touch a snowy girl  
Whose body blooms with cool withdrawal.  
From her little nook of peaceful scorn  
She casts unseeing eyes upon the crowd.  
Near her stands a weary newsboy  
With a sullenly elfin face.  
The night has leaned too intimately  
On the frightened scampering of his soul.  
But to this old, staidly patient woman  
With her softly wintry eyes,  
Night bends down in gentle revelation  
Undisturbed by joy or hatred.  
At her side two factory girls  
In slyly jaunty hats and swaggering coats,  
Weave a twinkling summer with their words:

A summer where the night parades  
Rakishly, and like a gold Beau Brummel.  
With a gnome-like impudence  
They thrust their little, pink tongues out  
At men who sidle past.  
To them, the frantic dinginess of day  
Has melted to caressing restlessness  
Tingling with the pride of breasts and hips.  
At their side two dainty, languid girls  
Playing with their suavely tangled dresses,  
Touch the black crowd with unsearching eyes.  
But the old man on the corner,  
Bending over his cane like some tired warrior  
Resting on a sword, peers at the crowd  
With the smouldering disdain  
Of a King whipped out of his domain.  
For a moment he smiles uncertainly.  
Then wears a look of frail sternness.

Musty, Rabelaisian odours stray  
From this naïvely gilded family-entrance  
And make the body of a vagrant  
Quiver as though unseen roses grazed him.  
His face is blackly stubbled emptiness  
Swerving to the rotted prayers of eyes.  
Yet, sometimes his thin arm leaps out

And hangs a moment in the air,  
As though he raised a violin of hate  
And lacked the strength to play it.  
A woman lurches from the family-entrance.  
With tense solicitude she hugs  
Her can of beer against her stunted bosom  
And mumbles to herself.  
The trampled blasphemy upon her face  
Holds up, in death, its watery, barren eyes.  
Indifferently, she brushes past the vagrant:  
Life has peeled away her sense of touch.

### III

With groping majesty, the endless crowd  
Pounds its searching chant of feet  
Down this tawdrily resplendent street.  
People stray into a burlesque theatre  
Framed with scarlet, blankly rotund girls.  
Here a burly cattle-raiser walks  
With the grace of wind-swept prairie grass.  
Behind him steps a slender clerk  
Tendering his sprightly stridency  
To the stolid, doll-like girl beside him.  
At his side a heavy youth  
Dully stands beneath his swaggering mask;

And a smiling man in black and white  
Walks, like some Pierrot grown middle-aged.

Mutely twinkling fragments of a romance:  
Tiny lights stand over this cabaret.  
Men and women jovially emboldened  
Stroll beneath the curtained entrance,  
And their laughs, like softly brazen cow-bells,  
Change the scene to a strange Pastoral.  
Hectic shepherdesses drunk with night,  
Women mingle their coquettish colours. . . .  
Suddenly, a man leaps out  
From the doorway's blazing pallor,  
Smashing into the drab sidewalk.  
His drunken lips and eyelids break apart  
Like a clown in sudden suicide.  
Then the mottled nakedness  
Of the scene comes, like a blow.

Stoically crushed in hovering grey  
Night lies coldly on this street.  
Momentary sounds crash into night  
Like ghostly curses stifled in their birth. . . .  
And over all the blankly box-like buildings  
Raise their sodden architecture  
Into the poised lyric of the sky.









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